



HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS! Did you know the North American Aerospace Defense Command staff and more than 360 volunteers track Santa's ride across the globe beginning at 6 a.m. Dec. 24? Real-time NORAD updates via e-mail, the Internet and telecasts are transferred into streaming audio and video updates and then translated into French, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese and English.



GAZEBOEXPRESS

YOUR COMMUNITY NEWS AND EVENT SOURCE FOR THE TOWN OF HIGHLAND • DECEMBER 2012

DISASTER RELIEF

Prompt to the rescue! Fleet aids Hurricane Sandy victims

Before Hurricane Sandy made her wrath felt along the East Coast, Oscar Baca and 16 of his coworkers in seven Prompt Ambulances were making their way to New Jersey to help residents ride out the storm. A week later, another crew of Prompt Ambulance volunteers did the same.

Prompt was part of a national effort coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that involved 500 ambulances and about 1,500 paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

"When we arrived at Fort Dix, half of our team was deployed to Queens while the rest were sent to Staten Island," said Baca, an EMT and fleet manager for Prompt. "The scene was really chaotic. They had us on hold during high winds when waves were more than 40 feet high but as soon as we were able to move again, we performed water rescues and worked around-the-clock with the New York Fire Department to evacuate nursing homes, a hospital and other locations."



PROMPT RESPONSE: A Prompt Ambulance caravan approaches the Brooklyn Bridge, where 40-foot waves threatened the roadway. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

Yachts in streets, sand-coated roads, downed power lines and trees made every rescue harder.

"I thought I had an idea of what we were getting into but I was wrong," said the husband and father of five. "The scene was surreal. We operated on no sleep, limited food and no showers for days. I would go back in a minute, though, because it felt good to be able to help."

Highland's first responders are ready when disaster strikes

A railroad car that overturns in south Highland, leaking deadly chlorine gas. Upwind, Warren Elementary School students are enjoying a typical day. The proximity of the two makes for an instant emergency and an eye-opening table-top disaster drill for the schools, municipal department heads, NIPSCO, Canadian National Railroad and Prompt Ambulance.

Fire Chief Bill Timmer, who leads the town's disaster preparedness, said planning for the unavoidable is something the town and its departments do on a regular basis to find and eliminate frailties in the system and keep everyone safe.

"With this latest table-top disaster drill, we wanted to test things a little bit, pushing everyone to think about precautions," Timmer said.

"We had to plan for contingencies that included evacuating an entire school along with the neighborhoods around the school, re-routing traffic and having the utility figure out how they were going to safeguard the power supply. We had to figure out what kind of impact we would have, how fast we could get our resources deployed, what we could do on our own and where we would need major help."

SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRY

A confidential service designed to save time in case of emergency is being offered by Highland Police for individuals who have disabilities, including autism and dementia.

Chief Pete Hojnicky said a Special Needs Registry for First Responders will provide vital information to police, fire and ambulance personnel during emergency situations.

"In the event of an emergency, this registry can alert us to individuals in neighborhoods who have special needs for their vision, hearing or mobility as well as dementia and developmental disabilities," Hojnicky said.

Forms are available online at www.highlandpolice.com. Submitting a recent photo is optional.

INFO: Call Cpl. Jerry Koedyker at (219) 838-3184 or jkoedyker@highland.in.gov.

AMBULANCE CONTRACT

Prompt Ambulance will continue to provide 911 service for medical emergencies. The Town Council has approved a three-year, no-fee contract extension. Prompt has been providing paramedic-based pre-hospital care for medical emergencies since 2004, when the town partnered with Munster to negotiate the original contract.

STRACK'S ACQUISITION

Strack & Van Til's new corporate headquarters under construction in west Highland is already expanding to accommodate additional staff.

Strack & Van Til President David Wilkinson said in late November that he expects to add another 600-700 employees throughout the chain when a deal to purchase most of the region's Wise Way and PayLow grocery stores is completed by the end of December. Strack & Van Til employs about 5,000 at its 30 stores.

Administrative staff who will be managing the new acquisitions will be working at the headquarters, which is located at 2244-45th St.

AERIAL UNIT PURCHASE

The Town Council found another incredible deal, voting to purchase a used 2007 Ford Super Duty 4 X 4 truck equipped with an aerial unit.

The truck, which cost \$49,900, will be utilized primarily by Public Works to expedite routine tasks above grade, such as changing street light bulbs and trimming tree limbs.

PARKING REMINDER

Parked cars that encroach on the public sidewalk are causing hazardous walking and biking conditions for children throughout the community.

Councilman Dan Vassar wants to remind every homeowner that town laws prohibit parking on sidewalks – even if they are part of the driveway.

Vassar is encouraging residents to park legally on streets – where available – when driveways are full.



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NEWS TIP? STORY IDEA?

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GETTING A JUMP ON FITNESS RESOLUTIONS

Lincoln Center wasn't even on Thea DeVries' radar until her out-of-town physical therapist suggested it was the perfect place for the longtime Highland resident to rehab from hip surgery.

A tour of the new Lincoln Center and a quick comparison of the cost of a membership vs. the purchase of a new stationary bike was all it took.

"I joined the same day I checked it out," she said. "I was so impressed. Since I live in Highland, I knew they had remodeled but I was amazed when I walked in at how much Lincoln Center has to offer to residents and families in town."

The convenience factor coupled with the high-end fitness equipment has been an asset in DeVries' recovery.

Once- or twice-a-day workouts on the stationary bike are rehabilitating her hip and strengthening her leg.

HOLIDAY PROMOTION

Join Lincoln Fitness Center between Dec. 9 through Jan. 19 and the initiation fee will be waived.

INFO: Visit www.highlandparks.org for fitness center membership plans or call (219) 838-0114.

Even when her physical therapy has ended, DeVries has no plans to slack off.

"I know regular exercise is a great way to keep the weight down and stay healthy – especially during the winter," she said.

"Lincoln Center is a beautiful facility to go and exercise. Every cardio station has its own television, which keeps me a little distracted and makes the workouts go that much faster. Without my physical therapist, I would have never known that this wonderful – and affordable – option was available right here in Highland." 🍷

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR TOWN LEADERS: PETE HOJNICKI

POLICE CHIEF STRIVES TO KEEP OUR TOWN SAFE AND MAKE HIGHLAND A BETTER PLACE

Pete Hojnicky is a career cop living the dream.

The Police Chief, who is celebrating a decade as Highland's top cop, believes great fortune and dedication have coalesced around the job he loves as much today as when he hired on with the Gary Police Department 28 years ago.

A stint in that city's high-profile Patrol Tactical Unit while he was a sergeant in the National Guard's heavy equipment section laid the foundation for a stellar career in law enforcement.

Hired by Highland in 1986, Hojnicky was deployed five years later to a Drug Enforcement Agency task force assigned to dismantle narcotics organizations operating in northern Indiana.

Those real-life experiences have colored Hojnicky's career. His officers say it has made him a chief who still gets excited at the prospect of catching the bad guys and keeping town residents safe. That plays out with the way his officers patrol as well as the town's ongoing involvement with regional law enforcement initiatives that stretch the reach of his highly skilled force across municipal and regional boundaries.

Schooled at both Calumet College of St. Joseph

THE MAN BEHIND THE BADGE



Police Chief Pete Hojnicky manages a staff of 46 full-time employees, four part-timers, 32 VIPs and five chaplains. He is married with three children.

and the FBI's National Academy in Quantico, Hojnicky said the combination of academics and real-world experience has been invaluable.

"It's been a great benefit to apply policies and practices learned during 28 years of law enforcement from a perspective of working for town, city and federal governments," he said. "I've been fortunate because the resources and contacts extend through all levels and agencies of government."

His greatest challenge is providing the best for the town despite budget constraints. His greatest joy: Interacting with people in town.

"My coworkers, volunteers, concerned citizens, civic groups and spiritual organizations all strive to make Highland a better place," he said. "Our officers have dedicated themselves to law enforcement and keeping our town safe." 🍷

TOYS FOR TOTS

Bruce Wilkinson may be the region's very own Santa Claus but he is the first to admit he wouldn't be anything without a staff of elves, like Highland's own Sue Colias.

Wilkinson, a local Toys for Tots coordinator, said people like Colias keep the spirit of Christmas in their hearts all year round.

Colias, along with 11 one-time Highland High School choir students and their parents, spend an evening every December caroling in the Brantwood neighborhood.

The effort began three years ago and resulted in \$500 in donations. A year later, the group collected \$750 with their voices raised joyously in song. This year, they're aiming for \$1,000.

"The Marines were struggling to fill the bins with toys and I said to myself, 'This cannot be. This is for the kids. There has to be a way to raise some money for toys,'" she said. "My daughter felt the same way and we decided that caroling would be a great way to welcome the season and raise money to give more kids Christmas. Our neighbors enjoy it and it always puts a smile on our faces."

HIGHLAND DROP OFF SITES

Help us make this a Merry Christmas by donating new, unwrapped toys for children in need during this holiday season! The following Highland businesses are accepting donations through Dec. 18.

- ❖ **DOLLAR GENERAL**
8333 Indianapolis Boulevard
- ❖ **EDWARD JONES**
9515 Indianapolis • Suite 3
- ❖ **HIGHLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT**
2901 Highway Avenue
- ❖ **HIGHLAND TOWN HALL OR POLICE DEPARTMENT**
3333 Ridge Road
- ❖ **KUIPER FUNERAL HOME**
9039 Kleinman Road
- ❖ **THE PRIMITIVE PEDDLER**
2813 Jewett Street
- ❖ **PROMPT AMBULANCE**
9835 Express Drive
- ❖ **STANDARD BANK & TRUST**
2930 Ridge Road
- ❖ **TEXAS CORRAL**
9200 Indianapolis Boulevard
- ❖ **THOMAS DODGE**
9604 Indianapolis Boulevard
- ❖ **THOMAS KIA**
9825 Indianapolis Boulevard
- ❖ **WEBB HYUNDAI**
9236 Indianapolis Boulevard
- ❖ **VFW POST 1109**
8554 Kennedy Avenue

SHOP WITH A FIREFIGHTER

Firefighters will enjoy the company of a group of special children during this year's "Shop With a Firefighter" program in December. Fire Chief Bill Timmer said the day includes lunch and a holiday excursion where the children shop for themselves and their families.

"It's a great event that we enjoy as much as the kids do," Timmer said. "It's great to be able to put a smile on their faces and know that they will have a special Christmas."

WANT TO DONATE? Call (219) 923-9876 or email at btimmer@highland.in.gov.

PROTECT YOUR POCKETS

Pickpockets are especially active during the holidays when people tend to carry more cash and credit cards and shop laden with packages in crowded malls.

Highland Police want you to take precautions so you don't become a victim. Pickpockets need only a moment to steal a wallet from pockets or purses.

- Men should keep wallets in their front pockets. Women should keep their purses zipped on their shoulder and slung in front of them.
- Be aware of distraction techniques like asking you about a product or to read a label.
- Carry only the cash and credit cards you plan on using.
- Contact police regarding suspicious people and activities.

COUPONS FOR THE ARTS

Highland High School students involved in band, orchestra, choir and theatre are receiving food coupons at Langel's Pizza as a reward for their hard work.

"We try to support the Town of Highland and the schools as much as we can," Nicholette Langel said. "Community involvement and support of local businesses are what keep a town alive."

Members of the Main Street Art and Music Committee are working with local restaurateurs to expand the program.

FREE CLOTHING GIVEAWAY

First Christian Church of Dyer, 704 Joilet St., will be giving away clothes from noon to 3 p.m. Dec. 15. You must bring a photo ID and your own bags.

INFO: Call Rebecca at (219) 801-1956 or email rgdle71@comcast.net.



JOY TO THE WORLD

HOME DECORATING CONTEST

Decorate your home for the holidays and you could be eligible for cash prizes. Enter the contest and let your Park Board be the judge of the best decorated homes. Highland residents only please. Entry forms available at Lincoln Center.

ENTRY DEADLINE: December 9

JUDGING: December 13

AWARDS: Announced December 14

INFO: Call (219) 838-0114 or www.highlandparks.org.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS

All North Township preschool-aged children and their parent/guardian are invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The event features activities, pizza and beverages – all free! Each child should bring canned goods or staples to donate to the Old Firehouse Community Center.

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. December 12

WHERE: Wicker Park Clubhouse

INFO: Call Tya at (219) 923-9410.

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NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Celebrate the magic of the season with this timeless musical classic – “’Twas the Night Before Christmas.”

WHEN: Now through December 15

WHERE: The Theatre at the Center, 1040 Ridge Road, Munster

TICKETS: \$9.50 adults, \$7.50 children

INFO: Call (219) 836-3255 or www.theatreatthecenter.com.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Enjoy the sounds of the season at the Community Band's annual Christmas concert. The group will be collecting paper products and cleaning supplies – such as toilet paper, tissues, toothpaste, soaps, shampoos and laundry detergent – for the Highland Emergency Fund.

WHEN: 7 p.m. December 20

WHERE: Highland High School Monbeck Auditorium

INFO: Call (219) 838-0114 or www.highlandparks.org.

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CHRISTMAS STORY EXHIBIT

“A Christmas Story” exhibit features the original Macy's window displays from the popular holiday movie.

WHEN: Now through January 6

WHERE: The Indiana Welcome Center, 7770 Corinne Dr., Hammond

INFO: Call (219) 989-7979 or www.southshorecva.com.

NEW YEAR'S EVE FIREWORKS

Ring in the new year with a spectacular fireworks display at Main Square Park on New Year's Eve. Bring the family to enjoy the midnight show. Hot chocolate will be served beginning at 11:30 p.m.

WHEN: Midnight December 31

WHERE: Main Square Park

INFO: Call (219) 838-0114 or www.highlandparks.org.

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TWELFTH NIGHT CELEBRATION

The Holiday Festival of Lights will close with a Twelfth Night celebration. Residents are encouraged to bring their Christmas trees to Main Square to light up the night. Hot chocolate will be served to warm your hearts and toes.

WHEN: 6 p.m. January 6

WHERE: Main Square Park

INFO: Call (219) 838-0114 or www.highlandparks.org.

